

Johnson-Taylor Ranch House
(Rancho Penasquitos)
West of Black Mountain Road
Rancho Penasquitos
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-2072

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHNSON-TAYLOR RANCH HOUSE
(RANCHO PENASQUITOS)

HABS No. CA-2072

Location: West of Black Mountain Road, Rancho Penasquitos, San Diego County, California.

Present Owner: County of San Diego.

Present Use: Unoccupied.

Significance: This ranch house is one of the few remaining adobe structures of the nineteenth century in the San Diego area. It is in a relatively changed valley which once supported extensive cattle and citrus growing operations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Before 1883. There is little evidence on the date of building. There are no contemporary notices or accounts, and very little can be determined from the building itself.

A description of George Johnson's ranch in the April 28, 1869, issue of the San Diego Union mentions a farmhouse (see Appendix A). It is probable that this structure is the current ranch house, of at least a portion that has been incorporated into the present structure. The earliest known illustration of the ranch appears in the History of San Diego County, California, published in 1883, which shows the adobe complex and partly matured trees around it. (See Appendix B, and photo HABS-CA-2072-1). Thus, the date is uncertain, but the 1883 lithograph indicates that the building was then in existence, and it is likely to have been built in the 1860s or 1870s.

2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Johnson-Taylor Ranch House is located in the southwest corner of Section 24 of Township 14 south, Range 3 west. The following is an abstract of records in the Recorder's Office of San Diego County:

1869 Deed of May 28, 1869, recorded in Book 5, pp. 435-436. Diego Alvarado and Rudecinda Osuna de Alvarado to George A. Johnson, one-half undivided interest in "El Rancho de los Penasquitos."

1877 Deed of November 26, 1877, recorded in Book 33, p. 148. Diego Alvarado and his wife to George A. Johnson. Part of Rancho de los Penasquitos. The property was sold by sheriff's sale February 21, 1881. It passed through several hands before.

1882 Deed of October 16, 1882, recorded in book 41, p. 479. J. A. Taylor sold off his investment little by little between 1887 and 1890.

4. Original plans, construction etc: No original plans are known.
 5. Alterations and additions: The only documentary evidence for the original appearance of the adobe complex is the lithograph published in 1883. This illustration shows the rancho as a U-shaped complex, whose main structures appear to be in the same positions which the buildings occupy today. The north building is connected to the main central block by the curious V-shaped element still seen on the building today. Beyond this, very little information can be deduced since the lithograph gives a general impression rather than a detailed record of the building's appearance.
- B. Historical Context: George Johnson, a native of New York moved to San Diego in 1850. He had been instrumental in forming the Colorado River Navigation Company. In 1859 he married Estefano, daughter of a prominent Old Town San Diego citizen, Francisco Alvarado. He apparently lived at the rancho even before he obtained a half interest in the property in 1869.
- C. Sources of Information:
1. Old Views:
 - a. Lithograph of rancho in History of San Diego County, California, Wallace W. Elliot and Col, 1883. This shows the ranch in an aerial view from the northwest. (View reproduced as HABS No. CA-2072-1).
 - b. Watercolor showing a corner of the interior court by Mrs. Eva Scott Fenyes, dated 1914. This picture is reproduced in Thirty-two Adobe Houses of Old California, Isabell Lopez de Fages, 1950, p. 24. The introduction in the book states that the original was given to the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles.
 - c. Photograph, 1890, of courtyard. Reproduced as HABS No. CA-2072-2.
 2. Books and Articles:

Kerr Collection, Vol. 4, p. 230. Vast compendium of material on early California ranchos, handwritten, in the Serra Museum.

See also National Register of Historic Places nomination form: Johnson-Taylor Ranch Headquarters (copy in field notes accompanying this report).

Appendix A.

The following account was published in the San Diego Union, April 28, 1869:

At the request of Captain George A. Johnson, in company with some friends, we paid a visit last week to Penasquitos, the Captain's home. The ranch is situated about 16 miles from San Diego and some four or five miles from where the road to Los Angeles passed through the Soledad Valley. The road was in fine condition and the ride was exceedingly exhilarating. Among those lovely valleys, it passed, crossing, sometimes, gurgling streams of water, shaded by large trees filled with birds of silvery voices and among flowers of the most beautiful hues. We were but a little more than two hours in making the trip. No pen can describe the beauties of the scene by which the house is surrounded, situated in a valley near a little stream skirted by tall and graceful cottonwood and slender willows; on either hand, the hills roll back in graceful undulations covered with verdure and flowers of every color. The lands around the house are tastefully laid out and filled with fruit and ornamental trees, grape vines, strawberries and vegetables. The Captain has displayed a great deal of taste in his election of trees and shrubbery and a disregard for expenses in preparing his grounds. A little below the house he has built a tank, or reservoir, 65 feet long by 35 feet in width and about 3-1/2 feet in depth. The sides are built of stone with a cement hard as flint. Into the reservoir, a stream of water supplied by a large spring is constantly flowing and upon the water-clear as crystal-ducks of several fine varieties are always swimming. The Captain's residence is not only commodious, but most conveniently planned and tastefully furnished; while the outhouses, barns, stables, milk house, wash house and bath house are in keeping with the dwelling and are well adapted to the convenience and pleasure of a gentlemen of taste and refinement. He has a couple of fine stallions, the pride of his eye, and some of the finest colts in the country. He is a prince in generosity and knows, not only how to live and take comfort, but how to make other comfortable and happy around him. With such a host in such a place and more than all-beneath the benign influence of amiable and accomplished horses, how else could the hours pass except more pleastantly?

Appendix B.

The second account is from the History of San Diego County, California, 1883, p. 120:

This magnificent property has been in the past used principally as a stock range for blooded cattle and horses; only about 300 acres being under fence, and cultivated in most part to grain.

The orchard of ten acres, produces oranges, limes, pears, apricots, peaches, figs, and grapes in perfection. The oranges command the highest price in San Francisco. The buildings consist of a large frame and adobe house, of fourteen rooms, surrounded by wide, commodious porches, enclosed with green lattice-work. The appurtenances were complete throughout, making this the most pleasant home-like country residence in San Diego. A short distance from the dwelling stands the milk-house, which is built of stone, is well-ventilated, and has in the center a large spring. Adjoining this milk-house and in their proper places, are the meat-house, laundry, servant's quarters, barns, stables, etc. all well built, and make up the most complete and beautiful home in southern California.

Prepared by: Robert Brueggmann
Historian
HABS San Diego Project
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description o Exterior:

1. Number of stories: The rancho is a one-story adobe complex.
2. Over-all dimensions: The north building (Building A) measures 79'-10" x 26'-6"; the west building (Building B), 90'-2" x 28'-3"; the south building (Building C), 38'-4" x 15'-9". The north and west buildings are joined by a wood infill (included in the dimensions of the north building) which is assumed to be a later addition.
3. Layout, shape: The three structures form a U which opens to the east.
4. Foundations: Stone walls are visible behind Building B, however, these may only be a retaining wall. Building C appears to have concrete foundations where visible. Building A's foundations are not visible.
5. Wall construction: The original construction is adobe brick with a white stucco finish, measuring two feet thick. The additions are of wood-stud construction and are finished with flush siding with recessed joints, painted white.
6. Structural framing system: The rafters (2" x 6") rest directly on the adobe walls, but are joined at the ridge pole (2" x 6"). The ceiling joists are also 2' x 6".
7. Porches:

Building A: A porch runs along the south facade for 20'-3", then there is a 5'-4" frame bathroom addition, then another porch, 7'-9". Building A's porches are both screened. The porch roof is a continuation of the roof of the main house.

Building B: A veranda runs almost the entire length of Building B on its east elevation. There is also a porch on the west side measuring 19'-10". The porch roofs, although of the same slope as the main gable, are 1'-8" below its cornice.

Building C: Verandas run the length of Building C on both north and south elevations. The porch roofs are continuations of the main roof. Porch roofs on all three buildings are supported by 6" square columns, have box cornices, exposed rafters and concrete floors. (The only exception is the west porch of Building B which has a wooden floor.)

8. Chimneys:

Building A has three chimneys; two adobe and one brick.

Building B also has three chimneys, all adobe.

Building C has one adobe chimney.

9. Openings:

a. Doorways:

Building A has three exterior doors, all opening on to the screened porches and having two tiers of molded panels.

Building B has eight exterior doors, all having two tiers of molded panels. Six of these open onto the eastern veranda. The remaining two open from wooden additions to porches on the western elevation.

Building C has four exterior doors, two opening onto the north veranda and two opening onto the south veranda.

b. Windows:

Building A has fifteen windows, six of which are located in adobe walls and have deep reveals. Another six are located in the frame additions and are simple two-over-two double-hung windows. The west end of the structure has a later bay with two double-hung windows, two-over-two with Italianate trim. The final window is a small double-hung one-over-one bathroom window.

Building B has nineteen windows, five of which are double-hung, and are located in adobe walls with deep reveals. The remainder are all much later windows in wood additions.

Building C has five windows, four of which are the original one-over-one double-hung in adobe walls. One window has been replaced with a casement (the opening is larger than the new window).

10. Roofs:

a. Shape: Each of the three buildings has a gable roof running along its longitudinal axis. Building A has a wooden addition on its east end with a gable that intersects the main gable at right angles. The other wooden additions have nearly flat roofs.

b. Covering: All roofs have asphalt shingles.

- c. Cornice: The overhangs vary between 18 and 19 inches. There is a simple fascia board nailed to the rafter ends. The boards forming the soffit are tongue-and-grooved and are nailed to the underside of the rafters.

B. Description of Interior:

1. Building A: Although now completely sheathed in flush siding with recessed joints, the core of the structure is a three-room adobe, with a linear room arrangement. Wooden additions have been added to both ends, the east addition being two rooms deep, the west addition having a bay with two windows and a bathroom. This addition contains a hallway joining buildings A and B. The adobe rooms measure east to west respectively: 13'-11" x 14'-10", 14'-5" x 23'-0", and 14'-7" x 10'-9".
2. Building B: The core of this structure is an adobe with five rooms connected longitudinally. All five rooms open to the east veranda. The north room connects to Building A through a hallway and has a fireplace in its north wall. Moving south, the next two rooms have fireplaces, sharing a chimney in the wall between them. Arched openings flank these fireplaces. The next room to the south is really two (a kitchen opening to the east and hallway to west). New arched openings have been cut in these walls, exposing the adobe bricks. The southernmost of the adobe rooms originally had a fireplace in its south wall. This has been subsequently opened up into a doorway connecting to the wooden addition on the extreme southern end of the structure. Much of the west veranda has been closed in to form rooms of wood construction. The adobe rooms measure respectively from north to south, 14'-0" x 16'-0", 14'-0" x 15'-11", 18'-0" x 16'-0", 11'-10" x 9'-0-1/2" (kitchen, 11'-11" x 5'-11-1/2" (hall)).
3. Building C: It is the most intact of the three structures. It is composed of two rooms on a E-W axis, each room opening directly to the outside and connected by a central door in the shared wall. The east room (kitchen) has an adobe fireplace in the east wall. This room measures 16'-10" x 13'-10". The west room measures 17'-10" x 12'-2-1/2".
4. Flooring: All rooms have 5" plank flooring, except the two rooms used as kitchens, which have concrete floors.
5. Wall and ceiling finish: All adobe rooms have white plaster walls and tongue-and-grooved ceilings. The wooden addition rooms have either wood panelling or plaster board.
6. Doors and doorways: There are twelve interior doorways and four arched openings. Building A is the only building with molded frames on windows and doors.

C. General setting and orientation:

1. The Johnson-Taylor adobe is situated near the east end of the Penasquitos canyon, about a mile off Black Mtn. Road. The U-shaped complex opens to the east towards Black Mtn. Road.
2. Outbuildings: The complex contains numerous outbuildings. To the north is an adobe and wooden barn measuring 74" x 27', a wood shed, 32'-7" x 16'-8, and a concrete octagonal cistern. To the south is a stone foundation, 64'-10" x 38'-0" and a stone spring house (badly deteriorated), 18'-2" x 18'-3". Just to the SE of Building C is wood water tower and farther to the SE to the SE are a wooden hen house 14'-2" x 12'-6" and a round stone well.

Prepared by: Kim Spurgeon
Project Supervisor
HABS San Diego Team
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